



## DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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### **Air samples show southeast Louisiana air meets federal standards**

BATON ROUGE -- The Department of Environmental Quality has analyzed more than 30 air samples taken in the area impacted by Hurricane Katrina. The results show that ambient air has returned to pre-hurricane quality in most areas.

DEQ scientists and toxicologists have also studied data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's air-canister samples and mobile air-sample lab, known as TAGA. Both agencies' data show air quality results meet all federal standards, according to DEQ.

"On Sept. 12th, the TAGA unit saw elevated levels of benzene near the Murphy Oil spill," said Jim Hazlett, DEQ senior scientist. "They came back a week later and those benzene levels had gone down. We (DEQ) came back a week later and the levels were down considerably. There were no visible areas of free-standing oil. The heat and sunny days the area had through most of September burned off the volatiles like benzene and that helped bring the levels down."

A sample taken near a fire on Sept. 5 near Veterans and West End boulevards showed benzene concentrations above minimal risk levels. The levels of benzene and other petroleum related chemicals decreased after the fire.

Before the hurricanes, DEQ operated seven air monitors in southeast Louisiana. Currently, the Kenner site is operational. Data from this site shows the air quality in the Jefferson and Orleans areas meets federal standards. Hahnville, Garyville and Marrero are also currently operational and have recorded no violations of federal or state ambient air standards. The department is in the process of buying equipment and finding shelters for monitors throughout the area. Stationary monitoring sites will be re-installed once power is fully restored to the area. The EPA continues to assist the state with the use of portable monitors until all of the sheltered monitor sites can be placed back into service.

"What we see at the Kenner monitor is what we expect to see in other areas throughout the impacted area," Hazlett said. "We have some monitors that are ready to go, like City Park, and all we need is power. Others, like Arabi, Meraux and Chalmette will be enhanced as we get the capability to install the equipment."

A review of particulate matter, known as PM 2.5, shows the region meets all federal ambient air standards for PM 2.5. DEQ scientists analyzed data from five EPA sites and found the air quality for PM 2.5 to be within a healthy range.

"Our ambient monitoring to date indicates the air quality is fine," said DEQ Administrator Chris Roberie. "There are still large amounts of debris inside and outside of people's homes, as well as other safety issues not related to air quality that people should be aware of when returning."

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